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THE
OLD MAN IN THE CORNER
UNRAVELS THE MYSTERY OF
THE RUSSIAN PRINCE
AND OF
DOG'S TOOTH CLIFF

BY
Enigma
BARONESS ORCZY



NEW YORK
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THE MYSTERY OF THE RUSSIAN PRINCE

THERE had been a great deal of talk about that time, in newspapers and amongst the public, of the difficulty an inexperienced criminal finds in disposing of the evidences of his crime—notably, of course, of the body of his victim. In no case, perhaps, was this difficulty so completely overcome—at any rate, so far as was publicly known—as in that of the murder of the individual known as Prince Orsoff. I am thus qualifying his title, because, as a matter of fact, the larger public never believed that he was a genuine prince—Russian or otherwise—and that even if he had not come by such a violent and tragic death the Smithsons would never have seen either their ten thousand pounds again, or poor Louisa's aristocratic bridegroom.

I had been thinking a great deal about this mysterious affair, and it was with deliberate intent that I walked over to Fleet Street one afternoon, in order to catch the Old Man in the Corner in his accustomed teashop, and get him to give me his views on the subject of the mystery that to this very day surrounds the murder of the Russian prince.

"Let me just put the whole case before you," the funny creature began, as soon as I had led him to talk upon the subject, "as far as it was known to the gen-

eral public. It all occurred in Folkestone, you remember, where the wedding of Louisa Smithson, the daughter of a late retired grocer, to a Russian prince whom she had met abroad, was the talk of the town.

"It was on a lovely day in May, and the wedding ceremony was to take place at Holy Trinity Church. The Smithsons—mother and daughter—especially since they had come into a fortune, were very well known in Folkestone, and there was a large crowd of relatives and friends inside the church, and another out in the street to watch the arrival of guests and to see the bride. There were camera men and newspaper men, and hundreds of idlers and visitors, and the police had much ado to keep the crowd in order.

"Mrs. Smithson had already arrived, looking gorgeous in what I understand is known as amethyst *crêpe-de-Chine*, and there was a marvellous array of Bond Street gowns and gorgeous headgear, all of which kept the lookers-on fully occupied during the traditional quarter of an hour's grace usually accorded to the bride.

"But presently those fifteen minutes became twenty. The clergy had long since arrived, the bridesmaids were waiting in the porch; but there was no bridegroom! Neither he nor his best man had arrived; and now it was half an hour after the time appointed for the ceremony—and, oh, horror! the bride's car was in sight. The bride in church waiting for the bridegroom! Such an outrage had not been witnessed in Folkestone within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

"One of the guests went at once to break the news

to the elderly relative who had arranged to give the bride away, and who was with her in the car, whilst another, a Mr. Sutherland Ford, jumped into the first available taxi, having volunteered to go to the station in order to ascertain whether there had been any breakdown on the line, as the bridegroom was coming down by train from London with his best man.

"The bride, hastily apprised of the extraordinary contretemps, remained in the car, with the blinds pulled down, well concealed from the prying eyes of the crowd, while the fashionable guests, relatives, and friends had perforce to possess their souls in patience.

"And presently the news fell like a bombshell in the midst of this lively throng. A taxi drove up, and from it alighted first Mr. Sutherland Ford, who had volunteered to go to the station for information, and then John and Henry Carter, the two latter beautifully got up in frock-coats, striped trousers, top-hats, and flowers in their buttonholes, looking obviously like belated wedding-guests. But still no bridegroom and no best man.

"The three gentlemen, paying no heed to the shower of questions that assailed them as soon as they had jumped out of the taxi, ran straight into the church, leaving every one's curiosity unsatisfied and public excitement at fever pitch.

" 'That was John and Henry Carter!' the ladies whispered agitatedly. 'Fancy their being asked to the wedding!'

"And those who were in the know whispered to those who were less favoured that young Henry had at one

time been engaged to Louisa Smithson, before she met her Russian prince, and that when she threw him over he was in such dire despair that his friends thought he would commit suicide.

"A moment or two later Mrs. Smithson was seen hurriedly coming out of church, her face pale and drawn, and her beautiful hat all awry. She made straight for the bride's car, stepped into it, and the car immediately drove off, whilst the wedding-guests trooped out of the church, and the terrible news spread like wildfire through the crowd, and was presently all over the town.

"It seems that when the midday train, London to Folkestone, stopped at Swanley Junction, two passengers who were about to enter a first-class compartment in one of the corridor carriages were horrified to find it in a terrible state of disorder. They hastily called the guard, and on examination the carriage looked indeed as if it had been the scene of a violent struggle. The door on the off-side was unlatched, two of the window straps were wrenched off, the anti-macassars were torn off the cushions, one of the luggage racks was broken, and the net hung down in strips, and over some of the cushions were marks unmistakably made by a blood-stained hand.

"The guard immediately locked the compartment and sent for the local police. No one was allowed in or out of the station until every passenger on the train had satisfied the police as to his or her identity. Thus, the train was held up for over two hours whilst preliminary investigations were going on.

“There appeared no doubt that a terrible murder had been committed, and telephonic communication all along the line presently established the fact that it must have been done somewhere in the neighbourhood of Sydenham Hill, because a group of men who were at work on the ‘up’ side of the line at Penge, when the down train came out of the tunnel, noticed that the door of one of the first-class carriages was open. It swung to again just before the train steamed through the station.

“A preliminary search was at once made in and about the tunnel; it revealed on the platform of Sydenham Hill Station a first-class single ticket of that day’s issue, London to Folkestone, crushed and stained with blood, and on the permanent way, close to the entrance of the tunnel on the Penge side, a soft black hat, and a broken pair of pince-nez. But as to the identity of the victim there was, for the moment, no clue.

“After a couple of wearisome and anxious hours the passengers were allowed to proceed on their journey. Among these passengers, it appears, were John and Henry Carter, who were on their way to the Smithson wedding. Until they arrived in Folkestone they had no more idea than the police who the victim of the mysterious train murder was; but in the station they caught side of Mr. Sutherland Ford, whom they knew slightly. Mr. Ford was making agitated inquiries as to any possible accident on the line. The Carters put him au fait with what had occurred, and as there was no sign of the Russian prince amongst the passengers who had just arrived, all three men

came to the horrifying conclusion that it was indeed the bridegroom elect who had been murdered.

"They communicated at once with the police, and there were more investigations and telephonic messages up and down the line, before the Carters and Mr. Ford were at last allowed to proceed to the church and break the awful news to those most directly concerned.

"And in this tragic fashion did Louisa Smithson's wedding-day draw to its end; nor, so far as the public was concerned, was the mystery of that terrible murder ever satisfactorily cleared up. The local police worked very hard and very systematically, but though, presently, they also had the help of one of the ablest detectives from Scotland Yard, nothing was seen or found that gave the slightest clue either as to the means which the murderer or murderers adopted for removing the body of their victim, or in what manner they made good their escape. The body of the Russian prince was never found, and as far as the public knows, the murderer is still at large, and although as time went on, many strange facts came to light, they only helped to plunge that extraordinary crime into darker mystery.

"The facts in themselves were curious enough, you will admit," the Old Man in the Corner went on, after a while. "Many of these were never known to the public, whilst others found their way into the columns of the sensational press, who battered on the 'Mystery of the Russian Prince' for weeks on end, and as far as the unfortunate Smithsons were concerned, there was

not a reader of the *Express Post* and kindred newspapers who did not know the whole of their family history.

"It seems that Louisa Smithson is the daughter of a grocer in Folkestone, who had retired from business just before the war, and with his wife and his only child led a meagre and obscure existence in a tiny house in Warren Avenue somewhere near the tram road. They were always supposed to be very poor, but suddenly old Smithson died, and it turned out that he had been a miser, for he left the handsome little fortune of fifteen thousand pounds to be equally divided between his daughter and his widow.

"At once Mrs. Smithson and Louisa found themselves the centre of an admiring throng of friends and relatives all eager to help them spend their money for their especial benefit; but Mrs. Smithson was shrewd enough not to allow herself to be exploited by those who, in the past, had never condescended to more than a bowing acquaintance with her. She turned her back on most of those sycophants, but at the same time she was determined to do the best for herself and for Louisa, and to this end she admitted into her councils her sister, Margaret Penny, who was saleswoman at a fashionable shop in London, and who immediately advised a journey up to town, so that the question of clothes might at once be satisfactorily settled.

"In addition to valuable advice on that score, this Miss Penny seems to have succeeded in completely turning her sister's head. Certain it is that Mrs. Smithson left Folkestone a quiet, sensible, motherly woman,

and that she returned six weeks later an arrogant, ill-mannered parvenue, who seemed to think that the possession of a few thousand pounds entitled her to ride rough-shod over the feelings and sentiments of those who had less money than herself.

"She began by taking a suite of rooms at the Splendide Hotel for herself, her daughter, and her maid. Then she sold her house in Warren Avenue, bought a car, and though she and Louisa were, of course, in deep mourning, they were to be seen everywhere in wonderful Bond Street dresses and marvellous feathered hats. Finally, they announced their intention of spending the coming winter on the Riviera, probably Monte Carlo.

"All this extravagant behaviour made some people smile. Others shrugged their shoulders and predicted disaster; but there was one who suffered acutely through this change in the fortune of the Smithsons. This was Henry Carter, a young clerk employed in an insurance office in London. He and his brother were Folkestone men, sons of a local tailor in a very small way of business, who had been one of old Smithson's rare friends. The elder Carter boy had long since 'cut his stick,' and was said to be earning a living in London by free-lance journalism. The younger one, Henry, remained to help his father with the tailoring. He was a constant visitor in the little house in Warren Avenue, and presently became engaged to Louisa. There could be no question of an immediate marriage, of course, as Henry had neither money nor prospects. However, presently old Carter died, the tailoring busi-

ness was sold for a couple of hundred pounds, and Henry went up to London to join his brother and to seek his fortune. Presently, he obtained a post in an insurance office, but his engagement to Louisa subsisted; the young people were known to be deeply in love with one another, and Henry spent most weekends and all his holidays in Folkestone in order to be near his girl.

"Then came the change in the fortune of the Smithsons, and an immediate coolness in Louisa's manner towards young Henry. It was all very well in the past to be engaged to the son of a jobbing tailor, while one was poor oneself, and one had neither wit nor good looks, but now—

"In fact, already when they were in London Mrs. Smithson had intimated to Henry Carter that his visits were none too welcome, and when he appealed to Louisa she put him off with a few curt words. The young man was in despair, and, indeed, his brother actually feared at one time that he would commit suicide.

"It was soon after Christmas of that same year that the curtain was rung up on the first act of the mysterious tragedy which was destined to throw a blight for ever after upon the life of Louisa Smithson. It began with the departure of herself and her mother for the Continent, where they intended to remain until the end of March. For the first few weeks their friends had no news of them, but presently Miss Margaret Penny, who had kept up a desultory correspondence with a pal of hers in Folkestone, started to give glowing accounts of the Smithsons' doings in Monte Carlo.

“They were staying at the Hotel de Paris, paying two hundred francs a day for their rooms alone. They were lunching and dining out every day of the week. They had been introduced to one or two of the august personages who usually graced the Riviera with their presence at this time of year, and they had met a number of interesting people. According to Miss Penny’s account, Louisa Smithson was being greatly admired, and, in fact, several titled gentlemen of various nationalities had professed themselves deeply enamoured of her.

“All this Miss Penny recounted in her letters to her friends with a wealth of detail and a marvellous profusion of adjectives, and finally in one of her letters there was mention of a certain Russian grandee—Prince Orsoff by name—who was paying Louisa marked attention. He, also, was staying at the Paris, appeared very wealthy, and was obviously of very high rank, for he never mixed with the crowd, which was more than usually brilliant this year in Monte Carlo. This exclusiveness on his part was all the more flattering to the Smithsons, and when he apprised them of his intention to spend the season in London, they had asked him to come and visit them in Folkestone, where Mrs. Smithson intended to take a house presently, and there to entertain lavishly during the summer.

“After this preliminary announcement from Miss Penny, Louisa herself wrote a letter to Henry Carter. It was quite a pleasant, chatty letter, telling him of their marvellous doings abroad and of her own social successes. It did not do more, however, than vaguely

hint at the Russian prince, his distinguished appearance and obvious wealth. Nevertheless, it plunged the unfortunate young man into the utmost depths of despair, and according to his brother John's subsequent account, the latter had a terrible time with young Henry that winter. John himself was very busy with journalistic work which kept him away sometimes for days and weeks on end from the little home in London which the two brothers had set up for themselves with the money derived from the sale of the tailoring business. And Henry's state of mind did at times seriously alarm his brother, for he would either threaten to do away with himself, or vow that he would be even with that accursed foreigner.

"At the end of March the Smithsons returned to England. During the interval Mrs. Smithson had made all arrangements for taking the Towers, a magnificently-furnished house facing the Leas at Folkestone, and here she and Louisa installed themselves preparatory to launching their invitations for the various tea and tennis parties, dinners and dances which they proposed to give during the summer.

"One might really quite truthfully say that the eyes of all Folkestone were fixed upon the two ladies, and, of course, every one was talking about the Russian prince, who—Mrs. Smithson had confided this to a bosom friend—was coming over to England for the express purpose of proposing to Louisa.

"There was quite a flutter of excitement on a memorable Friday afternoon when it was rumoured that Henry Carter had come down for a week-end, and

had put up at a small hotel down by the harbour. Of course, he had come to see Louisa Smithson; every one knew that, and no doubt he wished to make a final appeal to her love for him which could not be entirely dead yet.

“Within twenty-four hours, however, it was common gossip that young Henry had presented himself at the Towers and been refused admittance. The ladies were out, the butler said, and he did not know when they would be home. This was on the Saturday. On the Sunday Henry walked about on the Leas all the morning, in the hope of seeing Louisa or her mother, and as he failed to do so he called again in the early part of the afternoon; he was told the ladies were resting. Later he came again, and the ladies had gone out; and on the Monday, as presumably business called him back to town, he left by the early morning train without having seen his former fiancée. Indeed, people from that moment took it for granted that young Henry had formally been given his congé.

“Towards the middle of April, Prince Orsoff arrived in London. Within two days he telephoned to Mrs. Smithson to ask her when he might come to pay his respects. A day was fixed, and he came to the Towers to lunch. He came again, and at his third visit he formally proposed to Miss Louisa Smithson, and was accepted. The wedding was to take place almost immediately, and the very next day the exciting announcement had gone the round of the Smithsons’ large circle of friends—not only in Folkestone but also in London.

“The effect of the news appears to have been staggering as far as the unfortunate Henry Carter was concerned. In the picturesque language of Mrs. Hicks, the middle-aged charlady who ‘did’ for the two brothers in their little home in Chelsea, ‘’e carried on something awful.’ She even went so far as to say that she feared he might ‘put ’is ’ead in the gas oven,’ and that as Mr. John was away at the time, she took the precaution every day when she left to turn the gas off at the meter.

“The following week-end Henry came down to Folkestone, and again took up his quarters in the small hotel by the harbour. On the Saturday afternoon he called at the Towers, and refused to take ‘no’ for an answer when he asked to see Miss Smithson. Indeed, he seems literally to have pushed his way into the drawing-room where the ladies were having tea. According to statements made subsequently by the butler, there ensued a terrible scene between Henry and his former fiancée, at the very height of which, as luck would have it, who should walk in but Prince Orsoff?

“That elegant gentleman, however, seems to have behaved on that trying occasion with perfect dignity and tact, making it his chief business to reassure the ladies, and paying no heed to Henry’s recriminations, which presently degenerated into vulgar abuse and ended in violent threats. At last, with the aid of the majestic butler, the young man was thrust out of the house, but even on the doorstep he turned and raised a menacing fist in the direction of Prince Orsoff, and said loudly enough for more than one person to hear:

“‘Wait! I’ll be even with that accursed foreigner yet!’

“It must indeed have been a terrifying scene for two sensitive and refined ladies like Mrs. and Miss Smithson to witness. Later on, after the prince himself had taken his leave, the butler was rung for by Mrs. Smithson, who told him that under no circumstances was Mr. Henry Carter ever to be admitted inside the Towers.

“However, a Sunday or two afterwards, Mr. John Carter called and Mrs. Smithson saw him. He said that he had come down expressly from London in order to apologise for his brother’s conduct. Henry, he said, was deeply contrite that he should thus have lost control over himself; his broken heart was his only excuse. After all, he had been, and still was, deeply in love with Louisa, and no man worth his salt could see the girl he loved turning her back on him without losing some of that equanimity which should, of course, be the characteristic of every gentleman.

“In fact, Mr. John Carter spoke so well and so persuasively that Mrs. Smithson and Louisa, who were at bottom quite a worthy pair of women, agreed to let bygones be bygones, and said that, if Henry would only behave himself in the future, there was no reason why he should not remain their friend.

“This appeared a quite satisfactory state of things, and over in the little house in Chelsea, Mrs. Hicks gladly noted that ‘Mr. ’Enry seemed more like ’isself, afterwards.’ The very next week-end the two brothers

went down to Folkestone together, and they called at the Towers so that Henry might offer his apologies in person. The two gentlemen on that occasion were actually asked to stay to tea.

“Indeed, it seems as if Henry had entirely turned over a new leaf, and when presently the gracious invitation came for both brothers to come to the wedding, they equally graciously accepted.

“The day fixed for the happy event was now approaching. The large circle of acquaintances, friends, and hangers-on which the Smithsons had gathered around them were all agog with excitement, wedding presents were pouring in by every post. A kind of network of romance had been woven around the personalities of the future bride, her mother, and the Russian prince. The wealth of the Smithsons had been magnified a hundredfold, and Prince Orsoff was reputed to be a brother of the late Tsar, who had made good his escape out of Russia, bringing away with him most of the Crown jewels, which he would presently bestow upon his wife. And so on, ad infinitum.

“And upon the top of all that excitement and that gossip, and marvellous tales akin to the Arabian Nights, came the wedding day with its awful culminating tragedy.

“The Russian prince had been murdered, and his body so cleverly disposed of that, in spite of the most strenuous efforts on the part of the police, not a trace of it could be found.

“That robbery had been the main motive of the

crime was quickly enough established. The Smithsons—mother and daughter—had at once supplied the detective in charge of the case with proofs as to that.

“It seems that as soon as the unfortunate prince had become engaged to Louisa, he asked that the marriage should take place without delay. He explained that his dearest friend, Mr. Schumann, the great international financier, had offered him shares in one of the greatest post-war undertakings which had ever been floated in Europe, and which would bring in to the fortunate shareholders a net income of not less than ten thousand pounds yearly for every ten thousand pounds invested; Mr. Schumann himself owned one-half of all the shares, and had, by a most wonderful act of disinterested generosity, allowed his bosom friend, Prince Orsoff, to have a few, a concession, by the way, which he had only granted to two other favoured personages, one being the Prince of Wales, and the other the President of the French Republic. Of course, to receive ten thousand pounds yearly for every ten thousand pounds invested, was too wonderful for words; the President of the French Republic had been so delighted with this chance of securing a fortune that he had put two million francs into the concern, and the Prince of Wales had put in five hundred thousand pounds.

“And it was so wonderfully secure, as obviously the British Government would not have allowed the Prince of Wales to invest such a sum of money if the business was only speculative. Security and fortune beyond the dreams of thrift—it was positively dazzling!

“No wonder that this vision of untold riches made poor Mrs. Smithson’s mouth water, the more so as she was quite shrewd enough to realise that, at the rate she was going, her share in the fifteen thousand pounds left by the late worthy grocer would soon fade into nothingness. In the past few months she and Louisa had spent considerably over four thousand pounds between them, and once her daughter was married to a quasi-royal personage, good old Mrs. Smithson did not see herself retiring into comparative obscurity on a few hundreds a year, to be jeered at by all her friends.

“So she and Louisa talked the matter over together, and then they talked it over with Prince Orsoff on the occasion of his visit about ten days before the wedding. The prince at first was very doubtful if the great Mr. Schumann would be willing to make a further sacrifice in the cause of friendship. He was an international financier accustomed to deal in millions; he would not look favourably—the prince feared—at a few thousands. Mrs. Smithson’s entire fortune now only consisted of about five thousand pounds; this she was unwilling to admit to the wealthy and aristocratic future son-in-law. So the two ladies decided to pool their capital, and then they begged that Prince Orsoff should ask the great Mr. Schumann whether he would condescend to receive ten thousand pounds for investment in Mrs. Smithson’s name in his great undertaking.

“Fortunately, the great financier did condescend to do this—he really was more a philanthropist than a business man—but of course he could not be kept waiting; the money must reach him in Paris not later than

May 20th, which was the very day fixed for the wedding.

"It was all terribly difficult, and Mrs. Smithson was at first in despair, as she feared she could not arrange to sell out her securities in time, and the difficulties were increased a hundredfold because, as Prince Orsoff explained to her, Mr. Schumann would even at the eleventh hour refuse to allow her to participate in the huge fortune if he found that she had talked about the affair over in England. The business had to be kept a profound secret for international reasons; in fact, if any detail relating to the business and to Mr. Schumann's participation in it were to become known, the whole of Europe would once more be plunged into war.

"To make a long story short, Mrs. Smithson and Louisa sold out all their securities, amounting between them to ten thousand pounds. Then they went up to London, drew the money out of their bank, changed it themselves into French money so as to make it more convenient for Mr. Schumann, and handed the entire sum over to Prince Orsoff on the eve of the wedding.

"Of course, such fatuous imbecility would be unbelievable if it did not occur so frequently, vain, silly women, who have never moved outside their own restricted circle, are always the ready prey of plausible rascals.

"Anyway, in this case the Smithsons returned to Folkestone that day, perfectly happy and with never a thought of anything but contentment for the present and prosperity in the future. The wedding was to be the next day; the bridegroom-elect was coming down

by the midday train with his best man, whom he vaguely described as secretary to the Russian Embassy, and the bridal pair would start for Paris by the afternoon boat.

"All this the Smithsons related to the police-inspector in charge of the case, and subsequently to the Scotland Yard detective, with a wealth of detail and a profusion of lamentations, not unmingled with expletives directed against the unknown assassin and thief. For, indeed, there was no doubt in the minds of Louisa and her mother that the unfortunate prince, on whom the girl still lavished the wealth of her trustful love, had been murdered for the sake of the money which he had upon his person.

"At first Mrs. Smithson and Louisa fastened their suspicions upon the anonymous best man, the so-called secretary of the Russian Embassy. Even when they were presently made to realise that there was no such thing as a Russian Embassy in London these days, and that minute enquiries both at home and abroad regarding the identity of a Prince Orsoff led to no result whatever, they repudiated with scorn the suggestion put forth by the police that their beloved Russian prince was nothing more or less than a clever crook who had led them by the nose, and that in all probability he had not been murdered in the train, but had succeeded in jumping out of it and making good his escape across country.

"This the Smithson ladies would not admit for a moment, and with commendable logic they argued that if Prince Orsoff had been a crook and had intended to

make away with their money he could have done that easily enough without getting into a train at Victoria and jumping out of it at Sydenham Hill.

“Pressed with questions, however, the ladies were forced to admit that they knew absolutely nothing about Prince Orsoff. They had never been introduced to any of his relations, nor had they met any of his friends. They did not even know where he had been staying in London. He was in the habit of telephoning to Louisa every morning, and any arrangements for his visits down to the Towers, or the ladies’ trips up to town, were made in that manner. As a matter of fact, Louisa and her future husband had not met more than a dozen times altogether, on some five or six occasions in Monte Carlo, and not more than six in England. It had been a case of love at first sight.

“On the occasion of their visit to London to draw out their money for the great undertaking he had met them at Victoria Station, and taken them to a quiet hotel in Kensington, where he had engaged a suite of rooms for them. All financial matters were then settled in their private sitting-room.

“In answer to inquiries at that hotel, one or two of the employees distinctly remembered the foreign-looking gentleman who had called on Mrs. and Miss Smithson, lunched with them in their sitting-room that day, and saw them into their cab when they went away the following afternoon. One or two of the station porters at Victoria also vaguely remembered a man who answered to the description given of Prince Orsoff by the Smithson ladies: tall, with a slight stoop, wearing pince-

nez, and with a profusion of dark, curly hair, bushy eyebrows, long, dark moustache and old-fashioned imperial which made him distinctly noticeable. He could not very well have passed unperceived.

“Unfortunately on the actual day of the murder not one man employed at Victoria Station could swear positively to having seen him, either alone, or in the company of another foreigner; and the latter has remained a problematical personage to this day.

“But the Smithson ladies remained firm in their loyalty to their Russian prince. Had they dared they would openly have accused Henry Carter of the murder; as it was, they threw out weird hints and insinuations about Henry who had more than once sworn that he would be even with his hated rival, and who had actually travelled down in the same train as the prince on that fateful wedding morning, together with his brother John, who, no doubt, helped him in his nefarious deed. I believe that the unfortunate ladies actually spent some of the money which now they could ill spare in employing a private detective to collect proofs of Henry Carter’s guilt.

“But not a tittle of evidence could be brought against him. To begin with, the train in which the murder was supposed to have been committed was a non-stop to Swanley. Then how could the Carters have disposed of the body? The Smithsons suggested a third miscreant as a possible confederate; but the same objection against that theory subsisted in the shape of the disposal of the body. The murder—if murder there was—occurred in broad daylight in a part of the coun-

try that certainly was not lonely. It was not possible to suppose that a man would stand waiting on the line close to Sydenham Hill Station until a body was flung out to him from the passing train, and then drag that body about until he found a suitable place in which to bury it; and all that without being seen by the workmen on the line, or employees on the railway, or, in fact, any passer-by. Therefore the hypothesis that Henry Carter or his brother murdered the Russian prince, with or without the help of a confederate, was as untenable as that the prince had travelled from Victoria to Sydenham Hill, and there jumped out of the train, at risk of being discovered in the act, rather than disappear quietly in London, shave off his luxuriant hair, or assume any other convenient disguise, until he found an opportunity for slipping back to the Continent.

“Thus the public was confronted with the two hypotheses, both of which led to a deadlock. No sensible person doubted that the so-called Russian prince was a crook, and that he had a confederate to help him in his clever plot, but the mystery remained as to how the rascal or rascals disappeared so completely as to checkmate every investigation. The travelling by train that morning and setting the scene for a supposed murder was, of course, part of the plan, but it was the plan that was so baffling, because to an ordinary mind that disappearance could have been effected so much more easily and with far less risk without the train journey.”

The Old Man in the Corner ceased talking, and be-

came once more absorbed in his favourite task of making knots in a bit of string.

"I see in the papers," I now put in thoughtfully, "that Miss Louisa Smithson has overcome her grief for the loss of her aristocratic lover by returning to the plebeian one."

"Yes," the funny creature replied drily, "she is marrying Henry Carter. Funny, isn't it? But women are queer fish! One moment she looked on the man as a murderer; now, by marrying him, she actually proclaims her belief in his innocence."

"It certainly was abundantly proved," I rejoined, "that Henry Carter could not possibly have murdered Prince Orsoff."

"It was also abundantly proved," he retorted, "that no one else murdered the so-called prince."

"You think, of course, that he was an ordinary impostor?" I asked.

"An impostor, yes," he replied, "but not an ordinary one. In fact, I take off my hat to as clever a pair of scamps as I have ever come across."

"A pair?"

"Why, yes! It could not have been done alone!"

"But the police—"

"The police"—the spook-like creature broke in with a sharp cackle—"know more in this case than you give them credit for. They know well enough the solution of the puzzle which appears so baffling to the public, but they have not sufficient proof to effect an arrest. At one time they hoped that the scoundrels would presently make a false move and give themselves away,

in which case they could be prosecuted for defrauding the Smithsons of ten thousand pounds, but this eventuality has become complicated through the master-stroke of genius which made Henry Carter marry Louisa Smithson."

"Henry Carter?" I exclaimed. "Then you do think the Carters had something to do with the case?"

"They had everything to do with the case. In fact, they planned the whole thing in a masterly manner."

"But the Russian prince at Monte Carlo?" I argued. "Who was he? If he was a confederate, where has he disappeared to?"

"He is still engaged in free-lance journalism," the Old Man in the Corner replied drily. "And in his spare moments changes parcels of French currency back into English notes."

"You mean the brother!" I ejaculated, with a gasp.

"Of course I mean the brother," he retorted drily. "Who else could have been so efficient a collaborator in the plot? John Carter was comparatively his own master. He lived with Henry in the small house in Chelsea, waited on by a charwoman who came by the day. It was generally given out that his reporting work took him frequently and for lengthy stays out of London. The brothers, remember, had inherited a few hundreds from their father, while the Smithsons had inherited a few thousands. We must suppose that the idea of relieving the ladies of those thousands occurred to them as soon as they realised that Louisa, egged on by her mother, would cold-shoulder her fiancé.

"John Carter, mind you, must be a very clever man,

else he could not have carried out all the details of the plot with so much sang-froid. We have been told, if you remember, that he had early in life 'cut his stick,' and gone to seek fortune in London; therefore, the Smithsons, who had never been out of Folkestone, did not know him intimately. His make-up as the prince must have been very good, and his histrionic powers not to be despised; his profession and life in London no doubt helped him in these matters. Then, remember also that he took very good care not to be a great deal in the Smithsons' company. Even in Monte Carlo he only let them see him less than half a dozen times, and as soon as he came to England he hurried on the wedding as much as he could.

"Another fine stroke was Henry's apparent despair at being cut out of Louisa's affections, and his threats against his successful rival; it helped to draw suspicion on himself—suspicion which the scoundrels took good care could easily be disproved. Then take a pair of vain, credulous unintelligent women and a smart rascal who knows how to flatter them, and you will see how easily the whole plot could be worked. Finally, when John Carter had obtained possession of the money, he and Henry arranged the supposed tragedy in the train and the Russian prince's disappearance from the world as suddenly as he had entered it."

I thought the matter over for a moment or two. The solution of the mystery certainly appealed to my dramatic sense.

"But," I said at last, "one wonders why the Carters took the trouble to arrange a scene of a supposed

murder in the train; they might quite well have been caught in the act, and in any case it was an additional unnecessary risk. John Carter might quite well have been content to shed his rôle of Russian prince without such an elaborate setting."

"Well," he admitted, "in some ways you are right there; but it is always difficult to gauge accurately the mentality of a clever scoundrel. In this case I don't suppose that the Carters had quite made up their minds about what they would do when they left London, but that the plan was in their heads is proved by the hat, pince-nez, and railway ticket which they took with them when they started, and which, if you remember, were found on the line; but it was probably only because the coach containing their compartment was empty, and they had both time and opportunity in the non-stop train, that they decided to carry their clever comedy through.

"Then think what an immense advantage in their future plans would be the Smithsons' belief in the death of their prince. Probably Louisa would never have dreamed of marrying if she thought her aristocratic lover were an impostor and still alive; she would never have let the matter rest, her mind would for ever have been busy with trying to trace him, and bring him back, repentant to her feet. You know what women are when they are in love with that type of scoundrel; they cling to them with the tenacity of a leech. But once she believed the man to be dead, Louisa Smithson gradually got over her grief, and Henry Carter wooed and won her on the rebound. She

was poor now, and her friends had quickly enough deserted her. She was touched by the fidelity of her simple lover, and he thus consolidated his position and made the future secure.

"Anyway," the Old Man in the Corner concluded, "I believe that it was with a view to making a future marriage possible between Louisa and Henry that the two brothers organised the supposed murder. Probably, if the train had been full, and they had seen danger in the undertaking, they would not have done it. But the *mise en scène* was easily enough set, and it certainly was an additional safeguard. Now, in another week or so, Louisa Smithson will be Henry Carter's wife, and presently you will find that John, in London, and Henry and his wife will be quite comfortably off. And after that, whatever suspicions Mrs. Smithson may have of the truth, her lips will have to remain sealed. She could not very well prosecute her only child's husband.

"And so the matter will always remain a mystery to the public; but the police know more than they are able to admit because they have no proof.

"And now they never will have. But as to the murder in the train—well, the murdered man never existed!"

THE MYSTERY OF DOG'S TOOTH CLIFF

THE Old Man in the Corner was more than usually loquacious that day; he had a great deal to say on the subject of the strictures which a learned judge levelled against the police in a recent murder case.

"Well deserved," he concluded, with his usual self-opinionated emphasis, "but not more so in this case than in many others, where blunder after blunder is committed and the time of the courts wasted without either judge or magistrate, let alone the police, knowing where the hitch lies."

"Of course, you always know," I remarked dryly.

"Nearly always," he replied, with ludicrous self-complacence. "Have I not proved to you over and over again that with a little reasonable common-sense and a minimum of logic there is no such thing as an impenetrable mystery in criminology. Criminology is an exact science to which certain rules of reasoning invariably apply. The trouble is that so few are masters of logic and that fewer still know how to apply its rules. Now take the case of that poor girl, Janet Smith. We are likely to see some startling developments in it within the next two or three days. You'll see if we don't, and they will open the eyes of the

police and public alike to what has been clear as daylight to me ever since the first day of the inquest."

I hastened to assure the whimsical creature that though I was acquainted with the main circumstances of the tragedy, I was very vague as to detail, and that nothing would give me greater pleasure than that he should enlighten my mind on the subject—which he immediately proceeded to do.

"You know Broxmouth, don't you," he began, after a while, "on the Wessex coast? It is a growing place, for the scenery is superb, and the air acts on jaded spirits like sparkling wine. The only drawback—that is from an artistic point of view—to the place is that hideous barrack-like building on the West Cliff. It is a huge industrial school recently erected and endowed by the trustees of the Woodforde bequest, for the benefit of sons of temporary officers killed in the war, and is under the presidency of no less a personage than General Sir Arkwright Jones, who has a whole alphabet after his name.

"The building is certainly an eyesore, and before it came into being, Broxmouth was a real beauty spot. If you have ever been there, you will remember that fine walk along the edge of the cliffs, at the end of which there is a wonderful view as far as the towers of Barchester Cathedral. It is called the Lovers' Walk, and is patronised by all the young people in the neighbourhood. They find it romantic as well as exhilarating—the objective is usually Kurtmoor, where there are one or two fine hotels for plutocrats in search of rural surroundings, and where humble folk like you and I

and the aforesaid lovers can get an excellent cup of tea at the Wheatsheaf in the main village street.

“But it is a daylight walk, for the path is narrow and in places the cliffs fall away, sheer and precipitous to the water’s edge, whilst loose bits of rock have an unpleasant trick of giving way under one’s feet. If you were to consult one of the Broxmouth gaffers on the advisability of taking a midnight walk to Kurt-moor, he would most certainly shake his head and tell you to wait till the next day, and take your walk in the morning. Accidents have happened there more than once, though Broxmouth holds its tongue about that. Rash pedestrians have lost their footing and tumbled down the side of the cliff before now, almost always with fatal results.

“And so, when a couple of small boys hunting for mussels at low tide in the early morning of May 5th last, saw the body of a woman lying inanimate upon the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, and reported their discovery to the police, every one began by concluding that nothing but an accident had occurred, and went on to abuse the town council for not putting up along the more dangerous portions of the Lovers’ Walk some sort of barrier as a protection to unwary pedestrians.

Later on, when the body was identified as that of Miss Janet Smith, a well-known resident of Broxmouth, public indignation waxed high; the barrier along the edge of the Lovers’ Walk became the burning question of the hour. But during the whole of that day the ‘accident’ theory was never disputed; it was only towards evening that whispers of ‘suicide’ began to cir-

culate, to be soon followed by the more ominous ones of 'murder.'

"And the next morning Broxmouth had the thrill of its life when it became known throughout the town that Captain Franklin Marston had been detained in connection with the finding of the body of Janet Smith, and that he would appear that day before the magistrate on a charge of murder.

"Properly to appreciate the significance of such an announcement it would be necessary to be oneself a resident of Broxmouth, where the Woodforde Institute, its affairs and its personnel are, as it were, the be-all and end-all of all the gossip in the neighbourhood. To begin with the deceased was head matron of the institute, and the man now accused of the foul crime of having murdered her was its secretary; moreover, the secretary and the pretty young matron were known to be very much in love with one another, and as a matter of fact Broxmouth had of late been looking forward to a very interesting wedding. The idea of Captain Marston—who, by the way, was very good-looking, very smart, and a splendid tennis player—being accused of murdering his sweetheart was in itself so preposterous, so impossible, that his numerous friends and many admirers were aghast and incredulous. 'There is some villainous plot here somewhere,' the ladies averred, and wanted to know what Major Gubbins' attitude was going to be under these tragic circumstances.

"Major Gubbins, if you remember, was headmaster of the school, and, what's more, he, too, had been very

much in love with Janet Smith, but it appeared that his friendship with Captain Marston had prompted him to stand aside as soon as he realised which way the girl's affections lay. Major Gubbins was not so popular as the captain; he was inclined to be off-hand and disagreeable, so the ladies said, and, moreover, he did not play tennis; and with the sublime inconsequence of your charming sex, they seemed to connect these defects with the terrible accusation which was now weighing upon the major's successful rival.

"The executive of the institute consisted, in addition to the three persons I have named, of its president, General Sir Arkwright Jones, who, however, took little, if any, interest in the concern. It seemed as if, by giving it the prestige of his name, he had done all that he intended for the furtherance of the institute's welfare. Then there were the governors, a number of amiable local gentlemen and ladies who played tennis all day and attended innumerable tea-parties, and knew as much about administering a big concern as a terrier does of rabbit-rearing.

"In the midst of this official supineness, the murder of the young matron, followed immediately by the arrest of the secretary, had come as a bombshell, and now wise heads began to wag, and ominous murmurs became current that for some time past there had been something very wrong in the management of the Woodforde Institute. Whilst, at the call of various august personages, money was pouring in from the benevolent public, the commissariat was being conducted on parsimonious lines that were a positive scandal. The

boys were shockingly underfed, and the staff of servants was constantly being changed because girls would not remain on what they called a starvation régime.

"Then again no proper accounts had been kept since the inception of the institute five years ago; books were never audited; no one, apparently, had the slightest idea of profit and loss or of balances; no one knew from week to week where the salaries and wages were coming from, or from quarter to quarter if there would be funds enough to meet rates and taxes; no one, in fact, appeared to know anything about the affairs of the institute, least of all the secretary himself, who had often remarked quite jocularly that he had never in all his life known anything about book-keeping, and that his appointment by the governors rested upon his agreeable personality rather than upon his financial and administrative ability.

"As you see, the captain's position was, in consequence of this, a very serious one; it became still more so when presently two or three ominous facts came to light. To begin with it seemed that he could give absolutely no account of himself during the greater part of the night of May 5th. He had left the institute at about seven o'clock; he told the headmaster then that he was going for a walk, which seemed strange, as it was pouring with rain. On the other hand the landlady at the room where he lodged told the police that when she herself went to bed at eleven o'clock, the captain had not come in; she hadn't seen him since morning, when he went to his work, and at what time he eventually came home she couldn't say.

"But there was worse to come. First, a stick was found on the beach some thirty yards or less from the spot where the body itself was discovered; and secondly, the police produced a few strands of wool which were, it seems, clinging to the poor girl's hatpin, and which presumably were torn out of a muffler during the brief struggle which must have occurred when she was first attacked and before she lost her footing and fell down the side of the cliff.

"Now the stick was identified as the property of Captain Marston, and he had been seen on the road with it in his hand in the early part of the evening. He was then walking alone on the Lovers' Walk. Two Broxmouth visitors met him on their way back from Kurtmoor. Knowing him by sight, they passed the time of day. These witnesses, however, were quite sure that Captain Marston was not then wearing a muffler; on the other hand, they were equally sure that he carried the stick. They had noticed it as a very unusual one, of what is known as Javanese snake-wood, with a round, heavy knob and leather strap which the captain carried slung upon his arm.

"Of course, the matter interested me enormously; it is not often that a person of the social and intellectual calibre of Captain Marston stands accused of so foul a crime. If he was guilty, then, indeed, he was one of the vilest criminals that ever defaced God's earth. The poor girl, it seems, had been in love with him right up to the end, and according to some well-informed gossips the wedding-day had actually been fixed.

"In the meanwhile the accused had been brought up

before the magistrate, and formal evidence of the finding of the body and of the arrest was given, as well as of the subsequent discovery of the stick, which was identified by the two witnesses, and of the strands of wool. The accused was remanded until the following Monday, bail being refused. The inquest was held a day or two later, and I went down to Broxmouth for it. I remember how hot it was in that crowded court-room; excited and perspiring humanity filled the stuffy atmosphere with heat.

"Louisa Rumble, who held the position of house-keeper at the Woodforde Institute, was one of the first witnesses called; and her evidence was intensely interesting because it gave one the first clue as to the motive which underlay the hideous crime. The woman's testimony, you must know, bore entirely on the question of housekeeping and of the extraordinary scarcity of money in the richly-endowed institute.

" 'Often and often,' said the witness, a motherly old soul in a flamboyant bonnet, 'did I complain to Miss Smith when she give me my weekly allowance for the tradesmen's books. " 'Tisn't enough, Miss Smith,' I says to 'er, "not to feed a family," I says, "let alone thirty growin' boys and 'arf a dozen working girls." But Miss Smith, she just shook 'er 'ead and says: "Committee's orders, Mrs. Rumble. I 'ave no power." "Why don't you speak to the captain?" I says to 'er. " 'E 'as the 'andling of the money. It is a scandal," I says. "Those boys can't live on boiled bacon an' beans, and not English nor Irish bacon it ain't neither," I says. "Pore lambs! The money I 'ave won't pay for

beef or mutton for them, Miss Smith," I says, "and you know it." But Miss Smith, she only shook 'er 'ead, and says she would speak to the captain about it.'

"Asked whether she know if deceased had actually spoked to the secretary on the subject, Mrs. Rumble said most emphatically 'Yes'!

"'What's more, sir,' she went on, 'I can tell you that the very day before she died, the pore lamb 'ad a reg'lar tiff with the captain about that there commis-sariat.'

"Mrs. Rumble had stumbled a little over the word, but strangely enough no one tittered; the importance of the old woman's testimony was impressed upon every mind and silenced every tongue. All eyes were turned in the direction of the accused. He had flushed to the roots of his hair, but otherwise stood quite still, with arms folded, and a dull expression of hopelessness upon his good-looking face.

"The coroner had asked the witness how she knew that Miss Smith had had words with Captain Marston. 'Because I 'eard them two 'aving words, sir,' Mrs. Rumble replied. 'I 'ad been in the office to get my money and my orders from Miss Smith, and we 'ad the usual talk about American bacon and boiled beans, with which I don't 'old, not for growing boys; then back I went to the kitchen, when I remembered I 'ad forgot to speak to Miss Smith about the scullery-maid, who'd been saucy and given notice. So up I went again, and I was just a-goin' to open the office door when I 'eard Miss Smith say quite loud and distinck: "It is shameful!" she says. "And I can't bear it!" she says.

"And if you don't speak to the general then I will. He is staying at the Queen's at Kurtmoor, I understand," she says, "and I am goin' this very night to speak with him," she says, "as I can't spend another night," she says, "with this on my mind." Then I give a genteel cough and—'

"The worthy lady had got thus far in her story when her volubility was suddenly checked by a violent expletive from the accused.

"'But this is damnable!' he cried, and no doubt would have said a lot more, but a touch on his shoulder from the warders behind him quickly recalled him to himself. He once more took up his outwardly calm attitude, and Mrs. Rumble concluded her evidence amidst silence more ominous than any riotous scene would have been.

"'I give a genteel cough,' she resumed with unruffled dignity, 'and opened the door. Miss Smith, she was all flushed, and I could see that she'd been crying; but the captain, 'e just walked out of the room, and didn't say not another word.'

"By this time," the Old Man in the Corner went on dryly, "we must suppose that the amateur detectives felt that there never had been so simple a case. Here, with the testimony of Mrs. Rumble, was the whole thing clear as daylight; motive, quarrel, means, everything was there already. And at first, when Miss Amelia Smith, sister of the deceased, who lived with her, was called, her appearance only roused languid curiosity. Miss Amelia looked what, in fact, she was—a retired school marm, and wore the regular hall-

mark of impecunious and somewhat soured spinsterhood.

“ ‘Janet often told me,’ she said, in the course of her evidence, ‘that she was quite sure there was roguery going on in the affairs of the institute, because she knew for a fact that subscriptions were constantly pouring in from the public, far in excess of what was being spent for the welfare of the boys. I often used to urge her to go straight to the governors or even to the president himself about the whole matter, but she would always give the same disheartened reply. General Arkwright Jones, it seems, had made it a condition when he accepted the presidency that he was never to be worried about the administration of the place, and he refused to have anything to do with the handling of the subscriptions; as for the governors, my poor sister declared that they cared more for tennis parties than for the welfare of a lot of poor officers’ children.’

“But a moment or two later we realised that Miss Amelia Smith was keeping her titbit of evidence until the end. It seems that she had not even spoken about it to the police, determined as she was, no doubt, to create a sensation for once in her monotonous and dreary life. So now she pursed up her lips tighter than before, and after a moment’s dramatic silence, she said:

“ ‘The day before her death my poor sister was very depressed. In the late afternoon, when she came in for tea, I could see that she had been crying. I guessed, of course, what was troubling her, but I didn’t say much. Captain Franklin Marston was in the habit

of calling for Janet in the evening, and they would go for a walk together; at eight o'clock on that sad evening I asked her whether Captain Marston was coming as usual; whereupon she became quite excited, and said: "No, no! I don't wish to see him!" And after a while she added, in a voice choked with tears: "Never again!"

"About a quarter of an hour later,' Miss Amelia went on, 'Janet suddenly took up her hat and coat. I asked her where she was going, and she said to me: "I don't know, but I must put an end to all this. I must know one way or the other." I tried to question her further, but she was in an obstinate mood. When I remarked that it was raining hard she said: "That's all right; the rain will go me good." And when I asked her whether she wasn't going to meet Captain Marston after all, she just gave me a look, but she made no reply. And so my poor sister went out into the darkness and the rain, and I never again saw her alive.'

"Miss Amelia paused just long enough to give true dramatic value to her statement, and, indeed, there was nothing lukewarm now about the interest which she aroused. Then she continued:

"As the clock was striking nine I was surprised to receive a visit from the headmaster, Major Gubbins. He came with a message from Captain Marston to my sister. I told him that Janet had gone out. He appeared vexed, and told me that the captain would be terribly disappointed.'

"What was this message?' the coroner asked, amidst breathless silence.

“ ‘That Janet would please meet Captain Marston at the Dog’s Tooth Cliff. He would wait for her there until nine o’clock!’ ”

The Old Man in the Corner gave a short, sharp laugh, and with loving eyes contemplated his bit of string, in which he had just woven an elegant and complicated knot. Then he said:

“Now it was at the foot of the Dog’s Tooth Cliff that the dead body of Janet Smith was found and some thirty yards further on the stick which had last been seen in the hand of Captain Franklin Marston. Nervous women gave a gasp, and scarcely dared to look at the accused, for fear, no doubt, that they would see the hangman’s rope around his neck. But I took a good look at him then. He had uttered a loud groan and buried his face in his hands, and I, with that unerring intuition on which I pride myself, knew that he was acting. Yes, deliberately acting a part—the part of shame and despair. You, no doubt, would ask me why he should have done this. Well, you shall understand presently. For the moment, and to all unthinking spectators, the attitude of despair on the part of the accused appeared fully justified.

“Later on we heard the evidence of Major Gubbins himself. He said that about seven o’clock he met Captain Marston in the hall of the institute.

“ ‘He appeared flushed and agitated,’ the witness went on, very reluctantly, it seemed, but in answer to pressing questions put to him by the coroner, ‘and told me he was going for a walk. When I remarked that it was raining hard, he retorted that the rain would do

him good. He didn't say where he was going, but presently he put his hand on my shoulder and said in a tone of pleading and affection which I shall never forget: "Old man, I want you to do something for me. Tell Janet that I must see her again to-night; beg her not to deny me. I will meet her at our usual place on the Dog's Tooth Cliff. Tell her I will wait for her there until nine o'clock, whatever the weather. But she must come. Tell her she must."

"'Unfortunately,' the major continued, 'I was unable to deliver the message immediately, as I had work to do in my office which kept me till close on nine o'clock. Then I hurried down to the Smiths' house, and just missed Miss Janet who, it seems, had already gone out.'

"Asked why he had not spoken about this before, the major replied that he did not intend to give evidence at all unless he was absolutely forced to do so, as a matter of duty. Captain Marston was his friend, and he did not think that any man was called upon to give what might prove damning evidence against his friend.

"All this sounded very nice and very loyal until we learned that William Peryer, batman at the institute, testified to having overheard violent words between the headmaster and the secretary at the very same hour when the latter was supposed to have made so pathetic an appeal to his friend to deliver a message on his behalf. Peryer swore that the two men were quarrelling, and quarrelling bitterly. The words he overheard were: 'You villain! You shall pay for this!' But he

was so upset and so frightened that he could not state positively which of the two gentlemen had spoken them, but he was inclined to think that it was Major Gubbins.

“And so the tangle grew, a tangled web that was dexterously being woven around the secretary of the institute. The two Broxmouth visitors were recalled, and they once more swore positively to having met Captain Marston on the Lovers’ Walk at about eight o’clock of that fateful evening. They spoke to him and they noticed the stick which he was carrying. They were on their way home from Kurtmoor, and they met the captain some two hundred yards or so before they came to the Dog’s Tooth Cliff. Of this they were both quite positive. Subsequently, when they were nearing home they met a lady who might or might not have been the deceased. They did not know her by sight and the person they met had her hat pulled down over her eyes and the collar of her coat up to her ears. It was raining hard then, and they themselves were hurrying along and paid no attention to passers-by.

“We also heard that at about nine o’clock James Hoggs and his wife, who live in a cottage not very far from the Dog’s Tooth Cliff, heard a terrifying scream. They were just going to bed and closing up for the night. Hoggs had the front door open at the moment, and was looking at the weather. It was raining, but nevertheless he picked up his hat and ran out towards the cliff. A moment or two later he came up against a man whom he hailed; it was very dark, but he

noticed that the man was engaged in wrapping a muffler round his neck. He asked him whether he had heard a scream, but the man said: 'No, I've not,' then hurried quickly out of sight. As Hoggs heard nothing more, or saw anything, he thought that perhaps, after all, he and his missus had been mistaken, so he turned back home and went to bed.

"I think," the Old Man in the Corner continued thoughtfully, "that I have now put before you all the most salient points in the chain of evidence collected by the police against the accused. There were not many faulty links in the chain, you will admit. The motive for the hideous crime was clear enough; for there was the fraudulent secretary and the unfortunate girl who had suspected the defalcations and was threatening to go and denounce her lover either to the president of the institute or to the governors. And the method was equally clear; the meeting in the dark and the rain on the lonely cliff, the muffler quickly thrown around the victim's mouth to smother her screams, the blow with the stick, the push over the edge of the cliff. The stick stood up as an incontestable piece of evidence. The absence from home of the accused during the greater part of that night had been testified to by his landlady, whilst his presence on the scene of the crime some time during the evening was not disputed.

"As a matter of fact, the only points in the man's favour were the strands of wool found sticking to the girl's hatpin, and Hoggs' story of the man whom he had seen in the dark, engaged in readjusting a muffler

around his neck. Unfortunately Hoggs, when more closely questioned on that subject, became incoherent and confused, as men of his class are apt to do when pinned down to a definite statement.

"Anyway, the accused was committed for trial on the coroner's warrant, and, of course, reserved his defence. He was brought up for trial the other day at the Barchester Assizes. In the meanwhile he had secured the services of Messrs. Charnton and Inglewood, the noted solicitors, who had engaged Mr. Provost Boon, K.C., to defend their client.

"You know as well as I do what happened at the trial, and how Mr. Boon turned the witnesses for the Crown inside out and round about until they contradicted themselves and one another all along the line. The defence was conducted in a masterly fashion. To begin with, the worthy housekeeper, Mrs. Rumble, after a stiff cross-examination, which lasted nearly an hour, was forced to admit that she could not swear positively to the exact words which she overheard between the deceased and Captain Marston. All that she could swear to was that the captain and his sweetheart had apparently had a tiff. Then, as to Miss Amelia Smith's evidence; it also merely went to prove that the lovers had had a quarrel; there was nothing whatever to say that it was on the subject of finance, nor that deceased had any intention either of speaking to the president about it, nor of handing in her resignation to the governors.

"Next came the question of Major Gubbins' story of the message which he had been asked by his friend

to deliver to the deceased. Now accused flatly denied that story, and denied it on oath. The whole thing, he declared, was a fabrication on the part of the major who, far from being his friend, was his bitter enemy and unsuccessful rival. In support of this theory William Peryer's evidence was cited as conclusive. He had heard the two men quarrelling at the very moment when accused was alleged to have made a pathetic appeal to his friend. Peryer had heard one of them say to the other: 'You villain! You shall pay for this!' And in very truth, the unfortunate captain was paying for it, in humiliation and racking anxiety.

"Then there came the great, the vital question of the stick and of the strands of wool so obviously torn out of a muffler. With regard to the stick, the accused had stated that in the course of his walk he had caught his foot against a stone and stumbled, and that the stick had fallen out of his hand and over the edge of the cliff. Now this statement was certainly borne out by the fact that, as eminent counsel reminded the jury, the stick was found more than thirty yards away from the body. As for the muffler, it was a graver point still. Strands of wool were found sticking to the girl's hatpin, and James Hoggs, after hearing a scream at nine o'clock that evening, ran out towards the cliff and came across a man who was engaged in readjusting a muffler round his throat. That was incontestable.

"Of course, Mr. Boon argued, it was easy enough to upset a witness of the type of James Hoggs, but an English jury's duty was not to fasten guilt on the first man who happens to be handy, but to see justice meted

out to innocent and guilty alike. The evidence of the muffler, argued the eminent counsel, was proof positive of the innocence of the accused. The witnesses who saw him in the Lovers' Walk on that fateful night had declared most emphatically that he was not wearing a muffler. Then where was the man with the muffler? Where was the man who was within a few yards of the scene of the crime five minutes after James Hoggs had heard the scream? The man who had denied hearing the scream although both Hoggs and his wife heard it over a quarter of a mile away?

"‘Yes, gentlemen of the jury,’ the eminent counsel concluded with a dramatic gesture, ‘it is the man with the muffler who murdered the unfortunate girl. If he is innocent why is he not here to give evidence? There are no side tracks that lead to the cliffs at this point, so the man with the muffler must have seen something or some one; he must know something that would be of invaluable assistance in the elucidation of this sad mystery. Then why does he not come forward? I say because he dare not. But let the police look for him, I say. The accused is innocent. He is the victim of tragic circumstances, but his whole life, his war-record, his affection for the deceased all proclaim him to be guiltless of such a dastardly crime; and, above all, there stands the incontestable proof of his innocence, the muffler, gentlemen of the jury—the muffler!’

"He said a lot more than that, of course," the Old Man in the Corner went on, chuckling dryly to himself. "And said it a lot better than ever I can repeat it, but

I have given you the gist of what he said. You know the result of the trial. The accused was acquitted, the jury having deliberated less than a quarter of an hour. There was no getting away from that muffler, even though every other circumstance pointed to Marston as the murderer of Janet Smith.

“On the whole, his acquittal was a popular one, although many who were present at the trial shook their heads, and thought that if they had been on the jury Marston would not have got off so easily; but for the most part these sceptics were not Broxmouth people. In Broxmouth the captain was personally liked, and the proclamation of his innocence was hailed with enthusiasm; and what's more, those same champions of the good-looking secretary—they were the women mostly—looked askance on the headmaster, who, they averred, had woven a Machiavellian net for trapping and removing from his path for ever a hated and successful rival.

“The police have received a perfect deluge of anonymous communications suggesting that Major Gubbins was identical with the mysterious man with the muffler, but, of course, such a suggestion is perfectly absurd, since at the very hour when James Hoggs heard the scream, and a very few minutes before he met the man with the muffler, Major Gubbins was paying his belated visit to Miss Amelia Smith and delivering the alleged message. Even those ladies who disliked the headmaster most cordially had to admit that he could not very well have been in two places at the same time.

The Dog's Tooth Cliff is a good half hour's walk from Miss Smith's house, and the Lovers' Walk itself is not accessible to cyclists or motors.

"And thus, to all intents and purposes, the Cliff murder has remained a mystery, but it won't be one for long. Have I not told you that you may expect important developments within the next few days? And I am seldom wrong. Already in this evening's paper you will have read that the entire executive of the Woodforde Institute has placed its resignation in the hands of the governors, that the august personages have withdrawn their names from the list of patrons, and that though the president has been implored not to withdraw his name, he has proved adamant on the subject, and even refused to recommend successors to the headmaster, the secretary, or the matron; in fact, he has seemingly washed his hands of the whole concern."

"But surely," I now broke in, seeing that the Old Man in the Corner threatened to put away his piece of string and to leave me without the usual epilogue to his interesting narrative—"surely General Sir Arkwright Jones cannot be blamed for the scandal which undoubtedly has dimmed the fortunes of the Woodforde Institute?"

"Cannot be blamed?" the Old Man in the Corner retorted sarcastically. "Cannot be blamed for entering into a conspiracy with his secretary and his headmaster to defraud the institute and then to silence for ever the one voice that might have been raised in accusation against him."

"Sir Arkwright Jones?" I exclaimed incredulously, for indeed the idea appeared to me preposterous then, as the general's name was almost a household word before the catastrophe. "Impossible!"

"Impossible!" he reiterated. "Why? He murdered Janet Smith! Of that you will be as convinced within the next few days as I am at this hour. That the three men were in collusion I have not the shadow of doubt. Marston only made love to Janet Smith in order to secure her silence; but in this he failed, and the girl boldly accused him of roguery as soon as she found him out. It would be inconceivable to suppose that being the bright, intelligent girl that she admittedly was, she could remain for ever in ignorance of the defalcations in the books. She must, and did, tax her lover of irregularities, she must have and, indeed, did threaten to put the whole thing before the governors. So much for the lovers' quarrel overheard by Mrs. Rumble.

"I believe that the fate of the poor girl was decided on then and there by two of the scoundrels; it only remained to consult with their other accomplice as to the best means for carrying their hideous project through. Janet had announced her determination to go to Kurtmoor that self-same evening, the only question was which of those three miscreants would meet her in the darkness and the solitude of the Lovers' Walk. But in order at the outset to throw dust in the eyes of the public and the police, and not appear to be in any way associated with one another, Marston and Gubbins made pretence of a violent quarrel which

Peryer overheard. Then Gubbins, in order to make sure that the poor girl would carry out her intention of going over to Kurtmoor that evening, went to her house, with the supposed message from Marston, and, incidentally, secured thereby his own alibi. This made him safe."

"Marston, in the meanwhile, went to arrange matters with Arkwright Jones. His position was, of course, more difficult than that of Gubbins. If there was to be murder—and my belief is that the scoundrels had been resolved on murder for some time before—the first suspicion would inevitably fall on the secretary who had kept the books and who had had the handling of the money. The miscreants had some sort of vague plan in their heads, of this you may be sure. They were only procrastinating, hoping against hope that chance would continue to favour them. But now the hour had come, the danger was imminent. Within the next four-and-twenty hours Janet Smith, being promised no redress on the part of the president, would place the whole matter before the governors—unless she was effectually made to hold her tongue.

"We can easily suppose that Marston would be clever enough to arrange to meet Arkwright Jones without arousing suspicion. We do know that soon after he finally quarrelled with Janet Smith he walked over to Kurtmoor. The two witnesses who spoke with him stated that they met him whilst they themselves were walking to Broxmouth. It was then past eight o'clock. Arkwright Jones had either dined at his hotel or not; we do not know, for it never struck the police to in-

quire at once how the popular general had spent his time on that fateful evening. You know what that sort of unconventional seaside place is. People spend most of their time out of doors, and there would be nothing strange, let alone suspicious, in any visitor going out for an hour after dinner, even if it rained.

"Then surely you can, in your mind, see those two scoundrels putting their villainous heads together, and as suspicion of any foul play would, of necessity, at once fall on Marston, Jones decided to take the hideous onus on himself. He went to the Dog's Tooth Cliff to meet Janet Smith himself, and borrowed Marston's stick to aid him in his abominable deed. He was clever enough, however, to throw it over the edge of the cliff some distance away from the scene of his crime. We do not know, of course, whether the poor girl recognised him, or whether he just fell on her in the dark; she gave only one scream before she fell.

"They were clever scoundrels, we must admit, but chance favoured them, too, especially in one thing. She favoured them when she prompted Arkwright Jones to put a muffler round his throat. This one fact, as you know, saved Marston's neck from the gallows. But for the strands of wool in the girl's hatpin, and Hoggs' brief view of a man manipulating a muffler, nothing but Jones' own confession could have saved his accomplice. Whether he would have confessed remains a riddle which no one will ever solve. But as to the whole so-called mystery, I saw daylight through it the moment I realised that Marston's despair and humiliation during the inquest was a pretence. If he feigned despair

it was because he desired temporarily to be the victim of circumstantial evidence. From that point to the unravelling of the tangled skein was but a step for a mind bent on logic."

"But," I argued, for indeed I was bewildered, and really incredulous, "what will be the end of it all? Surely three scoundrels like that will not go scot free. There will be an inquiry into the affairs of the institute; the governors—"

"The governors have talked of an inquiry," the funny creature broke in, with a chuckle, "but if you had any experience of these private charities, you would know that the first thing their administrators wish to avoid is publicity. The president of the Woodforde Institute had sufficient influence on the committee, you may be sure, to stifle any suggestion of creating public scandal by any sort of inquiry."

"But the question of the finances of the institute is, anyhow, public property now, and—"

"And it will be allowed to sink into oblivion. The executive has resigned. Marston and Gubbins will leave the country, and everything will be conveniently hushed up."

"But Arkwright Jones—" I protested.

"You see the papers regularly," he rejoined dryly. "Watch them, and you will see—"

I don't know when he went, but a moment or two later I found myself sitting alone at the table in the blameless teashop. The matter interested me more than I cared to admit, but, for once, I was not alto-

gether prepared to accept the funny creature's deductions.

Twenty-four hours later, however, I had to own that he had been right, when the following piece of sensational news appeared in the *Evening Post*:

"TRAGIC SEQUEL TO THE CLIFF MURDER

"An extraordinary sequel to the mysterious tragedy of the Dog's Tooth Cliff near Broxmouth occurred last night, when on the self-same spot where Miss Janet Smith met her death three months ago, General Sir Arkwright Jones lost his footing and fell a distance of two hundred feet on to the rocks below. It was a beautiful moonlight evening, and the tide being low a number of visitors were down on the beach at the time; but those who immediately hurried to the general's assistance found life already extinct. The distinguished soldier, who will be deeply mourned, must have been killed on the spot. Now, indeed, general public opinion, as well as every inhabitant of Broxmouth, will bring pressure to bear upon the Borough Council to see that a suitable barrier is erected along the dangerous portions of the beautiful Lovers' Walk. The double tragedy of this year's season renders such an erection imperative."

I was probably the only reader of that paragraph who guessed that the once distinguished soldier had not come accidentally by his death. No doubt the police had followed up the clue of the man with the

muffler, and were actually on the track of the miscreant, when the latter, guessing that exposure was imminent, preferred to put an end to his own miserable life.

I have since heard from friends at Broxmouth that Marston has gone to the Malay States, and that Gubbins is doing something in Germany. Curious creature Marston must have been! Imagine, after Jones had returned from his infamous errand and told him that the hideous deed was done, imagine Marston, walking back to Broxmouth along the Lovers' Walk in the rain and the darkness, past the Dog's Tooth Cliff, at the foot of which the body of the murdered girl lay! I wonder what would be the views of the Old Man in the Corner on the psychology of a man with nerve enough for such an ordeal.

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